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Al-Shaikh Mā' al-ʿAynayn: Maghrebi-Saharan literary geographies on the eve of colonization*

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ABSTRACT

Although the 19th-century Sufi figure al-Shaikh Ma' al-ʿAynayn led a major resistance movement in what is now southern Morocco, northern Mauritania, and the disputed Western Sahara while also becoming one of the most widely printed authors on the Fez lithographic press, very little information on his literary and scholarly output exists in Europhone sources. This is largely due to the marginalization of texts inconsistent with Middle East-centered narratives of reform and revival inspired by the encounter with Europe. As part of a larger effort to read Maghrebi literatures on their own terms rather than imposing European or Middle Eastern timelines and concepts, this article reads Ma' al-ʿAynayn's 1858 *rihla* (travelogue) to Mecca and shows how he conceptualized his world and traveled within it, including local, regional, and transregional elements.

KEYWORDS

North Africa; Mauritania; Arabic literature; colonialism; 19th-century African literature; hajj travelogue; Ma' al-ʿAynayn

Introduction: Revisiting Arabic literature from the eve of colonization

In reading the Maghreb beyond the Francophone, it is important to consider how the Arabic elements of North African textual and vernacular production have been distorted by assumptions of the region's position vis-à-vis the Middle East. It is often the case that, even when Maghrebi Arabics are acknowledged, they are assumed to be lagging behind a universal, transregional timeline located in either Cairo or Beirut, and this lag is often blamed on the Francophone. For example, Roger Allen states in his seminal study *The Arabic Novel*: "If Iraq was somewhat isolated from the geographical center of the Arab world, the same is even more true in the cases of Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia" (18).¹ In *Modern Arabic Literature*, Paul Starkey justifies that "Little has been said so far about Morocco, Algeria or Tunisia, countries in all of which fictional writing had remained conspicuously undeveloped by comparison with the central Arab world until at least the 1950s" (134). Both Allen and Starkey attribute this lag at least partially to the presence of French and Amazigh, as though languages are a zero-sum game, or as if there is any Arabophone context which is truly monolingual (Starkey 38; Allen xvi; Allen 134). In the case of 19th-century literature, the assumption that the Middle East is the gold standard has rendered Maghrebi literatures a

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footnote to larger narratives of crisis, reform, and modernity in response to the colonial threat with little regard for the distinct elements of the region's history.

Ironically, the assumption that North Africa is textually and geographically further from an ideal Arab center echoes Eurocentric models of World Literature which give the metropole the exclusive power to grant worldliness, and in the process make the very literatures the field is supposed to draw attention to seem inherently marginal. Francesca Orsini observes that these models' assumptions of fixed center-periphery relationships "end up making nine-tenths of the world (and its literature) drop off the map entirely or appear hopelessly 'peripheral'" (345). Orsini proposes looking at texts through what she terms significant geographies instead, meaning both the "real geographies" in which texts circulate and authors travel as well as the "imagined geographies" described and evoked by literature. This model allows us to study how writers create and participate in worlds which may have endless configurations beyond center-periphery, and which are more often than not neither entirely local nor entirely cosmopolitan in style, topoi, and circulation (Orsini 346). Charting the significant geographies of Maghrebi authors and scholars to see how they themselves create their world(s) and express their affiliations within them can be a productive start to the immense project of reading Maghrebi literatures on their own terms, rather than against a transposed Parisian or Cairene ideal.

In this article, I use significant geographies to show how a prolific anticolonial resistance figure used literature to propel his rise to power, including by narrating his own mastery of travel and space. Muṣṭafā Mā' al-ʿAynayn bin Muḥammad Fāḍil bin Ma'min al-Qalqamī (1831–1910), known as al-Shaikh Mā' al-ʿAynayn, was both an author and a political figure but is rarely considered as a contributor to Arabic literary history. He united the Saharan tribes to fight French and Spanish encroachments and, while he worked with four different Moroccan sultans to do so, he continued to have a sense of Saharan distinctiveness. He embraced new printing technology and, at one point, his works made up one quarter of the titles printed on Fez's lithographic press (ʿAbd al-Razzāq and Ibn al-Ṣagīr 202).² At the same time, the preambles to several of his poems reveal that he participated in a vernacular literary culture (ibn Ma'min and Ẓarīf 42). Although he hailed from a nomadic camp in the remote northwest Sahara, he achieved recognition in Fez, Marrakech, and Cairo. He wrote hundreds of texts on topics ranging from jurisprudence to Sufi conduct in both poetry and prose (Norris, "Mā' al-ʿAynayn al-ḲalḲamī"). He also trained many scholarly protégés, several of whom recorded his presence in their biographical dictionaries (Sukayrij and Idrīsī 172–7; Ibn Al-Shams 56–8), as did the prominent scholar Muḥammad ibn Jaʿfar ibn Idrīs al-Kattānī (Al-Kattānī et al. 490). He was praised in poems by the ʿulamā' of Fez as well as the followers that surrounded him in his Sufi city of Smara (al-Ni'mah), which was once estimated to support 10,000 seekers and laborers (al-Shinqīṭī and Sayyid 326–7). As his words were believed to contain blessings, his writings were known of and used in charms and spells by populations who were not necessarily literate (ʿAbd al-Razzāq and Ibn al-Ṣagīr 205). His legend lives on in Ḥassānīya Arabic dialect poetry, a novel by a Nobel-prize winning French author, and at least one recorded Amazigh folktale.³

Despite this legacy, the shaiikh has largely been written out of accounts of Arabic literature and Islamic thought. While he features in Moroccan histories of this period, it is in a manner that seeks to box him into nationalist narratives regarding

Morocco's claim on the northwest Sahara. For example, the introduction to the study *الشيخ ماء العينين وجهاده العلمي والوطني* ("Al-Shaikh Mā' al-'Aynayn and his Scholarly and Nationalist Endeavor") states: "The organization would like to thank the respected author for allowing it the honor of printing this book ... during this time in which the Moroccan people are eager to close the Saharan issue once and for all," implying that Mā' al-'Aynayn's legacy offers clear proof of a state's territorial claim despite the fact that he lived before the era of nation-states (Mā' al-'Aynayn 6). If Mā' al-'Aynayn's own world-making rarely registers in Arabic studies and reprints of his work, it is even rarer that he is considered as a scholar and not simply a military figure in Europhone sources.⁴ The exceptions are one brief acknowledgement of his scholarship in the 1971 edition of *Hesperis* (Du Puigauveau 157) and a recent book chapter analyzing Mā' al-'Aynayn's Sufi guide *نعت البدايات وتوصيف النهايات* (Patrizi 328). This has less to do with the scale of his impact and more to do with the fact that his thought and writing do not fit into conventional narratives of 19th-century renewal or reform provoked by the encounter with Europe (i.e. the Nahḍa movement). Although the shaikh directly confronted European technology and military power, he did not interpret these innovations as evidence that Islamic practices needed to be re-evaluated or modernized.

By reading the shaikh's work closely to see how he imagined and interpreted his world, this article creates a compelling case study of the geographies of text and travel alive in the Maghreb on the eve of colonialization, as well as an influential figure's reconceptualization of them. The logical starting point is the ḥajj the shaikh embarked on at the age of 28, where he first made contact with the larger Islamic world and began to assert his status as the Saharan figure fit to lead a larger fight. True to the nature of literary production during this period, the record of Mā' al-'Aynayn's ḥajj is not a single, discrete text but rather a patchwork of stories attributed to the shaikh and written down by his disciples and descendants at different times. For my study, I rely on the 2010 printed text assembled by Moroccan scholar Mā' al-'Aynayn Murabbīhi Rabbuh. This book is based mainly on an untitled manuscript recorded by a copyist, but it also includes relevant stories from other records in the footnotes.⁵ While much of the *riḥla*'s⁶ 70 pages consist of terse entries noting the places Mā' al-'Aynayn passed through and how long he stayed in them, there are also many descriptive passages which reflect his Saharan, Maghrebi, and transregional significant geographies.

From the Ḥawḍ to Tangier: Encountering and incorporating 'Alawite Morocco

When Mā' al-'Aynayn bin Muḥammad Fāḍil left his father's nomadic encampment in 1858 to perform the pilgrimage to Mecca, steamships, printing presses, and colonialism were shifting world political geographies and changing Muslims' perception of space (Gelvin and Green 15). Mā' al-'Aynayn embarked on a daring sea journey and, when he returned to his home in the Ḥawḍ (what is now southeast Mauritania bordering Mali) a year later, he became the first of his family to make it back from Mecca alive (Ibn al-'Atīq and al-Ẓarīf 318). In the local context, this was proof of divine favor. Despite the presence of pilgrimage caravans leaving from the trading town of Chinguetti, many scholars from the northwest Sahara ruled that the ḥajj was so dangerous for Saharans

that it was not an absolute duty (al-Idrīsī 114). Thus, Mā' al-ʿAynayn's travelogue is no mere record of people and places: it is a narrative of his mastery of space, and an endorsement of his power to draw new significant geographies. The Sufi visions and miracle tales (كرامات) connected to Mā' al-ʿAynayn's ḥajj further confirm the interconnected nature of literature and political power during this period.⁷

Due to the recent rise of pilgrimage by sea instead of land, the shaikh's significant geographies included Moroccan port cities instead of caravan stops across the Sahara through Algeria, Libya, and Sudan (Robertson & Sadiq 2). It was this mastery of the new nodes in the transregional Islamic network which led to Mā' al-ʿAynayn having both the imagination and the prestige necessary to tie his jihād to the Moroccan ʿAlawite dynasty. After receiving the permission of his father and spiritual guide al-Shaikh Muḥammad Fāḍil bin Ma'min, Mā' al-ʿAynayn set off with three other disciples and together they joined a string of desert caravans heading further north through the Saharan towns of Chinguetti, Tiris, and Guelmim. They reached Essaouira just in time to miss the year's last pilgrimage steamship (ibn Muḥammad Fāḍil and Mā' al-ʿAynayn 37). Thus began a series of detours within Morocco for Mā' al-ʿAynayn. He first headed to Marrakech to try to secure an audience with the Sultan Mawlāy ʿAbd al-Raḥmān (r. 1822–1859). When the sultan did not respond, the shaikh then travelled to Salé and met the heir apparent instead. Eventually Mā' al-ʿAynayn did visit the sultan, who insisted that the pilgrims celebrate ʿīd al-Fiṭr at his court before sending them off to Tangier. At this northern city over 2000 miles from his place of origin, Mā' al-ʿAynayn and his entourage finally boarded a steamship headed for Alexandria, Egypt (ibn Muḥammad Fāḍil and Mā' al-ʿAynayn 42). During his return journey, Mā' al-ʿAynayn visited the court again and swore an oath of loyalty to Mawlāy ʿAbd al-Raḥmān.

The significance of Mā' al-ʿAynayn's visit to the ʿAlawite court is often clouded by the Moroccan nationalist narrative that the shaikh's resistance movement was a natural extension of the disputed Western Sahara's immemorial ties to the Moroccan Sultanate, an argument which even reached the International Court of Justice (1975, 42). However, even a brief survey of precolonial sources shows such a claim to be overstated. A disciple of Mā' al-ʿAynayn's father included a Moroccan sultan in his biographical dictionary of the saints, showing that some Saharan scholars considered Moroccan sultans figures of distant religious authority (McLaughlin 124). There are also at least two other Saharan scholars who visited Sultan Mawlāy ʿAbd al-Raḥmān before Mā' al-ʿAynayn did, but neither of them went on to establish ongoing political ties nor to conduct regular visits to the court (Norris, *Pilgrimage of Ahmad*, 8, 18). In fact, as H.T. Norris observes, reading Aḥmad bin Ṭuwayr al-Jannah's (1788–1840) record of his 1829 visit seems to reveal the sultan's total ignorance of the Saharan region.⁸ Another story associated with Mā' al-ʿAynayn's ḥajj offers more evidence that his alliance with the ʿAlawite sultans was a strategic reformation of Saharan significant geographies.

The most well-known collection of the shaikh's sayings includes the following story from Mā' al-ʿAynayn's time in Mecca. Mā' al-ʿAynayn encounters three different men from disparate parts of the globe while renewing his ablution (wuḍūʿ). The first introduces himself as being from the edge of the Land of the Muslims ("bilād al-muslimīn"), where nothing lies beyond but the legendary Gog and Magog. The second man says he is from the land of the rising sun, and the third that he is from

the furthest part of Yemen from which there is nothing beyond but China (bilād al-Šīn). Each man describes himself as from a distant corner of the globe and, together with the shaikh, they embody Islam's spiritual, cultural, and linguistic reach in all four cardinal directions. Mā' al-'Aynayn then describes his homeland and where it falls on this map before inquiring about the natural features of each region:

فقلت لهم: لم يبق إلا صاحبكم، أعني نفسي، فإني من أقصى بلاد المغرب، والمسافة بيننا مع الحرم الشريف إذا كانت برا، فنحو عشرة أشهر أو تسعة، وأما بحرا فبحسب التيسير، والأغلب ستة أشهر أو نحوها أو قريب منه كما وقع لي. وسألت كل واحد منهم عن زمن الربيع عندهم ومجيء الأمطار، فإذا صاحب اليمن والمطلع، دهر الربيع عندهما فصل الخريف وما قاربه من الصيف، وذلك حال بلادنا التي هي "الحوض" ونحوه، وأما صاحب الشمال فدهر الربيع عندهم فصل الشتاء وما قاربه من فصل الربيع.

I said to them: there remains only your friend, meaning myself. I am from the furthest part of the Lands of the Maghreb and the distance between us and the Holy Mosque is about nine or ten months overland. As for by sea that depends on the circumstances, but it is usually six months or around that, as happened to me. Then I asked all of them about the season of spring where they are and the coming of rains. For the one from Yemen and the one from the place of [the] rising [sun], the time of spring is in autumn and the part of summer right by it. That is the case for our lands (bilād) which are the Ḥawḍ and its surroundings. As for the one from the North, the spring is for them is the season of winter and the part of spring right by it (ibn Muḥammad Faḍil and Murabbīh Rabbuh 46–47).

While Mā' al-'Aynayn sees "bilād al-Ḥawḍ" as part of the larger region of "bilād al-Maghrib," he explicitly clarifies that the Saharan subregion of the Ḥawḍ is what constitute his lands. He does not even identify himself as coming from the larger northwest Sahara. When the shaikh shifts the discussion to the social and political features of the other pilgrims' places of origin, the distinctive aspects of his Saharan identity become even clearer:

وسألتهم عما يتصرفون به في بلادهم فقالوا كلهم إن التصارف عندهم بالدينار والدرهم. وسألتهم هل بلادهم فيها السلاطين أو مستقيمة بلاد سلاطين؟ فقالوا كلهم إن بلادهم فيها السلاطين ولا تستقيم دونهم. فقلت: إن بلادنا لا يعرف أهلها ديناراً ولا درهماً، فأعترأوا غاية، وقالوا لي: بما التصارف عندهم؟ فقلت لهم: بالإنعام والأتواب والعبيد ونحو ذلك.

. فتعجبوا غاية العجب. وقلت لهم أيضاً: إن بلادنا لا سلطان فيها وأهلها مستقيمون غاية. وإنما يكون للقبيلة منها رئيس تأوي إليه في بعض أمورها، والناس مستقيمة على ذلك. وأهل علم كثير. فتعجبوا من هذين الأمرين غاية. وقالوا لي إنهم يعرفون في الحديث أن من أحق الناس بالأمان قوما لا يعرفون ديناراً ولا درهماً وما كنا نظن أنهم موجودون في الدنيا. فقلت لهم: نعم، هم أهل بلادنا: يعيش أحدهم العمر الطويل ولم ير ديناراً ولا درهماً ولا عرفه إلا إذا كان من أهل العلم فإنه يقرأ في الكتب. فلما قلت لهم ذلك، كانوا راوا الفصل لبلادنا وأهلها على بلادهم وأهلهم بذلك. ومن أغرب الأشياء أنهم جميعاً أعاجم. وليس فيهم أحد يعرف لغة الآخر. ولا يعرفون لغتي أنا التي هي الحسانية. ولكنهم كلهم أهل العلم وخبرون باللسان العربي. وأنا ما تكلمت لهم إلا به، ولم يتكلم منهم بعض لبعض غيري غفر الله لي.

Then I asked them [i.e. the other pilgrims] what they use to make purchases in their lands (bilād), so they all said that purchasing among them is done with dinars and dirhams. Then I asked them if are there sultans in their lands or are they upright without them? So they all said that there are sultans in their lands, and they could not stand without them. So I said: in our lands the people do not know of dinars or dirhams and they were very impressed. They said to me: how are purchases made among you? So I told them with livestock and clothing and slaves and such, and they were amazed. I also told them that in our lands there is no sultan, and the people are

very upstanding. Rather each tribe has a leader to which they turn to for some matters and the people stand on this. There are also many scholars.

They were very amazed by both of these things. They said to me that they know from the Ḥadīth that the most rightly secure people know neither dirham nor dinar, but they did not think that they existed in this world. I said to them yes, they are the people of my lands; one of them can live a long life and not see in it neither dinar nor dirham and not know of them except if he was of the scholars, then he reads of them in books. So when I said that to them, it was as if they saw the superiority of our lands and its people over their lands and their peoples in that regard.

Among the most curious of things was that they were all non-Arabs (‘Ajām) and not one of them knew the language of the other, and they did not know my own language which is Ḥassānīya. However, they were all scholars and thus experts in the Arabic tongue. So I did not talk to them except in it, and they did not talk to each other except for me, may God forgive me (ibn Muḥammad Faḍīl and Murabbih Rabbuh 47).

Thus when asked to describe his place of origin, Mā’ al-‘Aynayn sees tribal rule, the absence of a sultan, the absence of money, and the Ḥassānīya dialect of Arabic spoken in the northwest Sahara as the evocative elements. The section concerning currency is also telling, as the Moroccan treasury had been minting coins for centuries by the time of his writing (Miller 32). It should also be noted that Mā’ al-‘Aynayn portrays the traditional aspects of his remote and nomadic society as being sources of virtue. Saharan society stands without sultans to prop it up and, like the people mentioned by the Ḥadīth, the Saharans conduct their business without money. This is not evidence of ignorance, as the land has many scholars. In fact, it makes Muslims from other regions see the Ḥassānīya-speaking nomads of the Sahara as superior.

Mā’ al-‘Aynayn introduced himself as from the lands of the Ḥawḍ rather than from the lands of an imperial capital like Marrakech or Meknes. Thus, even by the time he reached Mecca, he did not consider himself part of the ‘Alawite Sultanate. This shows that his alliance with the ‘Alawites was a strategic political move which reshaped his followers’ significant geographies. By visiting the Moroccan sultan and swearing an oath of loyalty to him, the young Mā’ al-‘Aynayn began his career of strengthening ties between the northwest Saharan and the sultanate through writing, building Sufi lodges in major cities, and making frequent scholarly visits. He made his corner of the desert known to the central government, who later sponsored his resistance movement. By the same token, through narrating the many gifts the sultan bestows upon him and praising his aid to pilgrims, Mā’ al-‘Aynayn made the ‘Alawites significant to his followers.

The Hijāz and Egypt: Pan-Islamic maps and figures

Mā’ al-‘Aynayn encounters several figures of pan-Islamic power and transregional importance during his pilgrimage and, by weaving them into his travelogue, he creates an image of himself as the local embodiment of transregional political legitimacy. The first figure who plays this role is ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Efendī, the official entrusted by the Ottomans to receive and guide Saharan pilgrims in Mecca. Upon Mā’ al-‘Aynayn’s arrival in the holy city, Efendī greets him and takes him into his home where they stay up talking until the break of dawn. The second night Efendī invites Mā’ al-‘Aynayn to his home again, and again they talk until the sun rises. On the third night of their heart-to-heart, the topic turns to Mā’ al-‘Aynayn’s father and

Efendī is overcome with emotion as he recalls al-Shaikh Muḥammad Fāḍil. He kisses Mā' al-ʿAynayn's feet as tears stream from his eyes and he repeats over and over that God has answered his prayers. Efendī then explains that the Prophet showed him Muḥammad Fāḍil five days ago in a vision, and said that his heir (khalīfa) is here on earth and was sent on the ḥajj (ibn Muḥammad Fāḍil and Murabbīh Rabbuh 44). Efendī then presents Mā' al-ʿAynayn with fine clothing and necklaces of gold but, most precious of all, 12 pieces of the kiswa (the cloth covering the K'aba). The Prophet, Efendī continues, also told him that Mā' al-ʿAynayn has the secret which the Heavens and Planets rest on and that Mā' al-ʿAynayn will tell Efendī the secret of the Arabic letter “ح”.⁹ This encounter and the vision within it endorse Mā' al-ʿAynayn's right to inherit his father's religious and political power, narrated as though it was sent down from the heavens and channeled through a respected scholar of Mecca. Mā' al-ʿAynayn leaves with parts of the kiswa in his possession, symbolizing his permanent belonging to the Ḥijāz and its holy cities.

After completing his pilgrimage, Mā' al-ʿAynayn spends five months in Alexandria convalescing from smallpox. While he does not describe his illness nor his return journey by ship, he dedicates considerable space to the inventions he sees in Egypt and Malta as well as those he hears about secondhand (ibn Muḥammad Fāḍil and Murabbīh Rabbuh 63). Mā' al-ʿAynayn does not have an antagonistic response towards inventions such as the train and the telegraph, but rather stated that all there is and all there was occurred through God (32). He also does not take these new inventions as signs that Christians are more advanced. Thus this riḥla represents a hitherto marginalized perspective: a 19th-century Muslim scholar who embraced technology but did not interpret it as a sign that Islam needed to be reformed. Instead, Mā' al-ʿAynayn turned his descriptions of Egypt's new inventions into tales of Islamic might and resistance.

Mā' al-ʿAynayn refers to the train, telegraph, and manmade lake as curiosities “caused” by Muḥammad Sa'id Pasha (r. 1854–1863), the governor-general of Egypt and son of the famous statesman Muḥammad ʿAlī Pasha (r. 1805–1848). The pasha represents the second figure Mā' al-ʿAynayn uses to showcase his worldliness and political legitimacy, but he evokes the pasha through Egypt's advancements rather than directly. Mā' al-ʿAynayn begins by describing the train from Cairo to Alexandria, which he says is like a ship (bābūr; from Spanish “vapor”) that moves overland across sheets of metal and covers in only one hour a distance which would otherwise take one day. He ties this invention to Egypt's military strength, surmising that the train was made so indescribably large because it must transport the pasha's 3,400 guards and all of their weapons and supplies (ibn Muḥammad Fāḍil and Murabbīh Rabbuh 64–5). The manmade lake—which may be referring to the Maḥmūdiyya canal constructed during Muḥammad ʿAlī's rule but revived by Muḥammad Sa'id Pasha—is also spun into a tale of Islamic might as the shaikh calls it “a sea which [the pasha] pulled from the Nile until it arrived at Alexandria and there was now between the two a journey of three days, and ships started to go through it” (67). Instead of focusing on the measurements or construction of the canal, Mā' al-ʿAynayn imprints an impressive visual of the pasha physically moving bodies of water and changing their natural course.

The accompanying anecdote is even more explicitly about Muḥammad Saʿid Pasha's political strength and cunning, as Mā' al-ʿAynayn credits the pasha with a plot in which he first drove away the Muslim laborers working on the water passage by paying the Christian and Jewish workers more and praising them as better workers. This persisted until all of the Muslims quit and more Christian and Jewish replacements came. Then, once the digging reached the Nile, it burst forth and killed more than 100,000 of the workers and left the rest in dismal condition. This, Mā' al-ʿAynayn concludes, pleased the Muslims and they made their best supplications on behalf of the pasha (68). His observation of the presence of Christian and Jewish workers on major state projects shows that Mā' al-ʿAynayn is aware of European control and influence in the country, and yet he does not attribute technological progress to the occupiers. He wraps these advancements in Islamic power, and portrays Muḥammad Saʿid Pasha as capable of literally washing away the non-Muslim presence in Egypt after using them to finish his passage.

Following the inventions of Egypt, Mā' al-ʿAynayn includes some curiosities found among "the Christians", as he uses religious rather than ethnic or national designations throughout the text. His reports of Christian innovations are more terse, and Mā' al-ʿAynayn does not tie them to political or military influence. The first curiosity is one he saw himself in Malta, which he explains is a Christian village in the middle of the ocean between Tangier and Alexandria. Here he seems to be describing a water fountain which recycles water constantly. He then recounts a tale he heard of a Christian village which was among the best-made towns, and in it they never light a fire or a lamp (*sirāj*) and yet its light by night is the same as its light by day (71). Finally, Mā' al-ʿAynayn relays that many men he encountered told him how ships which sail through the air (i.e. hot air balloons) have become plentiful in the lands of the Christians and in the place of the 'Sultan of the Muslims,' which Mā' al-ʿAynayn clarifies is Istanbul (72). In addition to the relatively apolitical description of innovations among the Christians, he also qualifies one of their inventions as known to the Sultan of the Muslims. Such an endorsement of the Ottomans signals a sense of belonging to a larger pan-Islamic geography, which is strengthened by a scene at the Kaʿba where Mā' al-ʿAynayn notes that the name of the Ottoman Sultan Abdülmecid I (r. 1839–1861) is sewn into the *kiswa* along with the other Islamic rulers (51).

By writing the transregional Islamic geography into his pilgrimage story, Mā' al-ʿAynayn emerges as the Saharan shaikh who mastered space through the new technologies of steam and rail travel and encountered the latest developments of his time. By choosing to emphasize Muslim might in response to the foreign presence in Egypt, he imbues his readers and listeners with a sense of zeal for their own resistance movement which Mā' al-ʿAynayn then led until his death in 1910.

Return and reform in the northwest Sahara

After another visit to the Moroccan sultan and his heir, Mā' al-ʿAynayn made his way through the Sahara heading towards the Ḥawḍ at its southern edge (what is now Mauritania bordering Mali). He circulated among different scholars and was hosted

by several Saharan tribes, including the Tajākant, the al-‘Arūsiyīn, the al-Raqībāt, the Ait Ḥasan, and the Aitūsah. By staying among them, he spread his reputation as an esteemed ḥāj and scholar, and he also married into several tribes (al-‘Aynayn 35–65). After seeing the foreign presence in Egypt and allying himself with the Moroccan sultan, Mā’ al-‘Aynayn now begins to push for Saharan significant geographies to be united around a single Islamic figure instead of divided by tribe. His intervention begins with a scene in Tindouf where his hosts tell him that he must sacrifice an animal in order to gain protection. Mā’ al-‘Aynayn describes:

زمني ذلك في تجاكانت راودوني على أن افعل شيئا يفعله أهل تلك البلاد زوايا وعربا يقال له "الذبيحة". وهو أن يأخذ شخص من القبيلة شاة ويذبحها على أحد من رؤساء قبيلة أخرى تكون أقوى منها. وتكون المذبح عليها للذبيحة منزلة الأخ لأخيه فيما تقدر عليه من رد مظلمة والبحث عن سريفة إلى غير ذلك من منافعهم العادية. وتكون الذبيحة للمذبح عليها كالأخ أيضا لأخيه فيما تعذر عليه من المنافع. إلا أن هذه ليست منافعها في الأغلب لتلك إلا بشيء تعطيه لها من أيديهم لأنها في الغالب لا قدرة لها معها على ذلك. إذ لو كانت لها لما احتاجت إلى الذبيحة.

My time in which I was among the Tajākant [tribe], they told me that I must do something which the people of these lands do, both the ‘Arab [warrior caste] and Zawaiya [scholarly caste], called “al-dhabīḥa” [the sacrifice]. It is that one takes a sheep from a tribe and sacrifices it in the name of a leader of another tribe which is stronger. Then the tribe’s leader will take the place of a brother for the slaughterer in regards to dispersing his oppression, retrieving his stolen goods, and other common benefits. The slaughterer will also become like a brother to the tribe, except that he usually does not have benefits from his hands to give. If he did, he would not need to make dhabīḥa (ibn Muḥammad Fāḍil and Murabbīh Rabbuh 84–5).

However, Mā’ al-‘Aynayn objects to this expression of tribal power, so he takes a radical course of action. He recites two lines of poetry conveying that if he made a sacrifice in the name of a person instead of God it would be as if he is sacrificing himself, and slaughters an ewe in the name of God. In his riḥla, the poetry is recorded in both the Ḥassāniya dialect and in Standard Arabic, and its inclusion demonstrates the salience literature held for acts of power and resistance in the Maghreb at this time (ibn Muḥammad Fāḍil and Murabbīh Rabbuh 86). This story of breaking with nomadic tradition essentially places the pan-Islamic significant geography above tribal affiliations. It is easy to see how, after asserting with words and ritual that sacrifices are to be made to God alone, Mā’ al-‘Aynayn was later able to join different Saharan tribes in a jihād defending what he describes in his fatwa as bilād al-Muslimīn (“The Lands of the Muslims”) (al-‘Aynayn, *Al-Shaykh Mā’ al-‘Aynayn wa-ma’ rakat al-Dā khilah*). Through an associated karama tale which spread after his rejection of the dhabī ḥa, Mā’ al-‘Aynayn’s political power became endorsed on the popular level.

The karama goes that, following the shaikh’s refusal to perform the dhabīḥa, some of the Tajākant tribe’s camels were stolen by Idou w Bilāl tribesmen who had not heard of Mā’ al-‘Aynayn’s presence among them. Then, as the thieves were walking in the middle of the night, their clothing, weapons, and walking sticks all suddenly caught on fire. When they called out for their Shaikh Muḥammad Fāḍil, God in His mercy put out the mysterious fire (ibn Muḥammad Fāḍil and Murabbīh Rabbuh 88). This tale shows how, in the Saharan imagination, Mā’ al-‘Aynayn returned from ḥajj with the right to resist and change tribal loyalties and divisions. He returned having

realized his special proximity to God, and thus he became a source of authority higher than any single tribal leader. Even if Mā' al-'Aynayn defied cultural rules, those who opposed him would be supernaturally punished. In fact, Glen McLaughlin also found several poems which speak of Mā' al-'Aynayn's powers of retribution in a diwān from the Adrār region (204). Through evoking Shaikh Muḥammad Fāḍil, this *كرامة* also implies that Mā' al-'Aynayn has inherited his father's ability to bestow blessings and enact curses—especially when read alongside hagiographies of Muḥammad Fāḍil which repeatedly tell tales of his ability to curse those who stole from his tribe (McLaughlin 62).

Another *كرامة* associated with Mā' al-'Aynayn's ḥajj relates how the young shaikh made a supplication for Āflīyūwait, a childless man from the tribe Awlād Muḥam who gave Mā' al-'Aynayn his only camel in order to aid the shaikh's pilgrimage. After this good deed and Mā' al-'Aynayn's subsequent du'ā', Āflīyūwait had many children, became known for his massive herd of camels, and lived to be over 120 years old (al-'Aynayn 24). This tale stands as an exemplar of what is to be gained by supporting the shaikh and offers further evidence of his ability to change others' fortunes. Although both of these *كرامات* are now written, the genre is closely linked to oral storytelling and typically tales of saints travel through both written and vernacular media (Errazki-van Beek 85). Thus these stories undoubtedly contributed to his rise to power and gave him the legitimacy needed to lead the fight against European encroachments into the Sahara.

While on the surface this riḥla is simply a text written in Standard Arabic, many of the conventions of orality and vernacular address leave traces throughout it. The manuscript begins with "our shaikh al-Shaikh Mā' al-'Aynayn said," implying that—as with the famous riḥla of Ibn Baṭūṭah—this account was actually recited and then noted down (ibn Muḥammad Fāḍil and Murabbīh Rabbuh 23). The riḥla in its current form also draws from the pilgrimage-related stories recorded in *الفواكه في كل حين* *من كلام شيخنا ماء العينين*, a record of the shaikh's sayings which parallels the format of the Ḥadīth. The riḥla's preamble reproduces an exchange in rhymed prose between Mā' al-'Aynayn and his father as the former seeks his shaikh's permission to travel (ibn Muḥammad Fāḍil and Murabbīh Rabbuh 24–5). As other texts by Mā' al-'Aynayn describe the settings in which he would explain his poems and impart his teachings, it is likely that his riḥla was an oral tale before it was put to paper. This calls attention to the manner in which 19th-century manuscripts and early printings were often a means to preserve what would be recited and received aurally, rather than expressions of purely written genres, another aspect of the Maghreb beyond the Francophone which is often neglected.

Conclusion

In conclusion, a close reading of one Maghrebi figure's riḥla and its associated stories reveals that texts previously neglected as "traditional" and thus irrelevant to Arabic literary history have their own worlds to share. While he hailed from a remote region, Mā' al-'Aynayn used both regional and transregional elements in his ḥajj account and then proceeded to actively reshape local significant geographies through

his writing and poetry. Both Mā' al-'Aynayn's account of his pilgrimage and the miracle tales associated it confirm that literature, travel, and political legitimacy were intertwined in the Maghreb prior to colonization. The story whereby the shaikh mastered the new means of ḥajj and inserted himself into various, semi-overlapping geographies was essential to mobilizing his followers to resist colonial intrusions. While such a story goes against the narrative that 19th-century Arabic literature and Islamic thought were namely concerned with reform, revival, and "catching up" to Europe, it is no less a part of Maghrebi literary history beyond the Francophone.

Notes

1. Allen has since written about the distinctiveness of Moroccan literature and literary history, but he remained focused on pre-Independence roots of the novel instead of considering genres without clear Europhone equivalents (Allen 2011).
2. For a history of Fez's lithographic press, which demonstrated markedly different topical trends from the Egyptian Būlāq press of the same period, see Abdulrazak's dissertation *The Kingdom of the Book: The History of Printing in Morocco* (1997) and the introduction to Chih et al.'s edited volume *Sufism, Literary Production, and Printing in the Nineteenth Century* (2015).
3. For more on Mā' al-'Aynayn in dialect poetry see H.T. Norris' two articles published in *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* in 1968. J.M.G. Le Clézio's 1980 novel *Désert* portrays Mā' al-'Aynayn's migration from Smara to Tiznit in his final years. For an Amazigh folktale about Mā' al-'Aynayn, see page 17 of Harry Stroomer's *An Anthology of Tashelhiyt Berber Folktales* (South Morocco) (2001).
4. Colonial sources including Commandant Louis Frèrejean (1995), Émile Mauchamp (1911), and Commandant Breveté Gillier (1926) mention al-Shaikh Mā' al-'Aynayn as a military threat or a "fanatic." There are also articles from popular French periodicals which refer to him as "le sorcier bleu," and one *Tour du Monde* travelogue in which journalist Camille Douls (1888) describes meeting Mā' al-'Aynayn. None of these sources portray the shaikh as a scholar or author.
5. It is clear from the beginning of the manuscript that it was a copyist and not the shaikh himself who wrote down the text. Although the copyist does not include their name, older members of the Mā' al-'Aynayn family identified the handwriting as belonging to a disciple by the name of al-Qāḍi Baḥajbih bin Khuṭrī bin al-Shurfā Sibṭ al-Shaikh (ibn Muḥammad Fāḍil and Mā' al-'Aynayn 23).
6. Arabic travel account, often to Mecca.
7. Karāmāt (كرامات) can be loosely translated as miracle tales, but they also encompass less fantastical stories which show a Sufi saint's special access to divine power or favor. Especially in the context of the Islamic West, these tales of the power and blessings of saints serve larger political purposes related to building their followings (Stewart 106–7).
8. Mawlāy 'Abd al-Raḥmān asks Ṭuwayr al-Jannah about whether there is any agriculture or scholarship in the desert. Ṭuwayr al-Jannah, for his part, suggests that scholarship in the sultan's region could be improved by offering better sponsorship of the 'ulamā', defying the assumption that a nomad from the "periphery" would feel unable to compete with the literati of an imperial urban center (Norris, *The Pilgrimage of Ahmad*, 8).
9. For more on the esoteric Science of Letters in the Islamic scholarly tradition, see Fahd, T., "Ḥurūf" in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*.

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